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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

TUESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2008

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In Today's Papers

Erdogan Attends the 'Alliance of Civilizations' Talks in Madrid
All papers report Prime Minister Erdogan is in Madrid to attend the Alliance of Civilizations Summit. On Monday, he met with his Spanish counterpart, Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero.

During a breakfast meeting with 'Europa Press,' Erdogan said he cannot predict when Turkey's cross border offensive against the PKK in northern Iraq will end, "the authorization for operations expires after one year. If our fight against terrorism doesn't end after one year, we will ask the parliament for a new authorization to continue." He said Turkey's only objective is to eliminate terrorists, adding Turkey has the technology and the intelligence to do so "without hurting civilians." Erdogan emphasized that Turkey values Iraq's territorial integrity. Erdogan thanked the Bush Administration for the postponement of the Armenian genocide resolution submitted to the US Congress. "The Turkish government opened flights to Yerevan and restored an Armenian Orthodox church in Akhtamar Island in Van. There are 40,000 Armenians living in Turkey and Armenian citizens living in Turkey do not have problems," Erdogan said. He claimed the Armenian Diaspora is seeking financial compensation from Turkey. Erdogan said that within a month his government would propose changes to article 301 of the Turkish penal code which makes it a crime to insult "Turkishness."

He vowed a new constitution will solve the ban on wearing Muslim-style headscarves in public offices and universities in a way which would not cause tensions. "Even if the headscarf is a political symbol, you cannot ban political symbols or say that wearing a symbol is a crime," Erdogan remarked. "Girls in the US and Europe can wear headscarves in universities, but they cannot in Turkey where 99 percent of the population is Muslim. I believe we will resolve this problem," he said.

Asked why Turkey has drawn closer to Iran for energy cooperation even though Tehran has problems with the US and Israel, Erdogan said "Iran has gas; Israel and the US are unable to meet Turkey's energy demand." He added, "The US is a friend and an ally of Turkey; they have to understand that we must import gas from Iran," Erdogan said.

Turkey to Become 'Uranium Enrichment Center'

Mainstream Hurriyet columnist Erdal Saglam writes on page one that on Friday, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) officials will attend an international energy meeting in Istanbul and will discuss whether to set up a uranium enrichment center in Turkey. Top IAEA officials and representatives from the US, Russia, France, and Britain are to participate in the Istanbul talks. "The US, in the face of rising costs of natural gas and oil, wants the IAEA to establish a single authority on uranium enrichment. Turkey has been discussing the matter with the US, and would like to be considered as a candidate for uranium enrichment," says Saglam. According to Saglam, Turkey claims that Iran has said that it will accept uranium enrichment activities in third countries only if it is done in Turkey. The US blocked candidate requests from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria. Saglam suggests that Turkey's designation as a uranium enrichment center could end the argument between the US and Iran.

Debates about Moving The Central Bank to Istanbul Grow

Milliyet, Radikal, Sabah, Bugun, Zaman and others: Liberal Radikal opines "If the Government is right, then Ankara should be emptied out. If it is necessary to move financial organizations to Istanbul then why are the Coastal Security Command and the Naval Forces headquartered in Ankara when there is no sea in Ankara; why are the headquarters of the Southeast Anatolia Project in Ankara; why doesn't RTUK go to Istanbul because TV Channels are headquartered there?" Radikal and Milliyet report that former Central Bank presidents were joined by the opposition party CHP in their

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objections to the decision. Former President Sureyya Serdengeçti said that "moving the Central Bank to Istanbul is wrong for more than one reason, but the basic priority are the values of the Republic. Ataturk established the Republic, Ziraat Bank, Is Bank and the Central bank are in Ankara. Now, what is the meaning of moving all these to Istanbul?" Mainstream Milliyet quotes the Chairman of the Ankara Chamber of Commerce, Sinan Aygun, who said "financial migration will not benefit Istanbul's position as the finance headquarters, but will cause a major damage to Ankara".

President Gul Interview by Al-Hayat

Milliyet quotes President Gul during an interview with Arabic News Outlet Al-Hayat that Turkey did not promise anything to the US in return for its support of cross-border-operations, "Since Iraq is under the US control, the fight against terrorism is the US' responsibility and the US is fulfilling its responsibility." President Gul added that the fight will continue until the terrorist organization is eradicated.

Sudan's President to Come to Turkey

Milliyet reports that Sudanese president Omer-Al-Bashir will come to Turkey next week as the official guest of President Gul. President Bashir is accused of genocide in the killings of 200,000 and the displacement of up to 2,000,000 in Darfur. Reportedly, Bashir will come to Ankara on January 21 and will be received with a full military ceremony at the Presidential Palace. When Gul was foreign minister, he took into account the sensitivity of the international community and declined to pay a visit to Sudan. There are allegations that Sudan pressured Turkey to arrange the visit and PM Erdogan played a role in the arrangements.

EDITORIAL OPINION:

"What's the Need for Moving the Central Bank?"

Murat Yetkin wrote in intellectual-liberal Radikal: "It is obvious that the AKP government did not even ask for the Central Bank's opinion on the moving plan. Thus, Central Bank authorities in Ankara, including its President, are not doing anything for this plan. Former Central Bank Presidents are not talking positively

about the move either. Sureyya Serdengeçti, a former president, notes the close link between the Treasury and the Central Bank and says 'It does not make any sense to move the Central Bank from Ankara to Istanbul while the Central Bank continues to be heavily connected with public funds (Treasury).' Experts indicate that the Central Bank is a public institution and central banks are located in their respective capitals around the world with only a few exceptions. There is also a growing speculation about PM Erdogan's and the ruling AKP's political motives behind this decision. Circles opposed to the ruling AKP, including the main opposition party CHP, claim that PM Erdogan is acting deliberately to dilute the political influence of Ankara in decision-making mechanisms. PM Erdogan understands this sentiment because even diplomatic circles in Ankara have started wondering whether the AKP is acting with a hidden agenda. The decision to move the Central Bank to Istanbul does not have any significance nor does it make sense. PM Erdogan should be able to show virtue and admit his wrong decision."

"Headscarf Ban is to be Lifted"

Yalcin Dogan wrote in mainstream Hurriyet: "Talking with Professor Ergun Ozbudun, the head of the committee charged with drafting the new constitution, indicates that the committee members have taken the European Court of Human Rights and its verdicts as basis for their work. Based on Ozbudun's explanation about the draft, which is to be made public soon, the following items are some highlights. However, the draft will be vetted by the the AKP, therefore, Professor Ozbudun cannot guarantee that all of these listed will remain in the final draft:

- The individual will be stronger against the state;
- The President will no longer make Higher Education Council (YOK) and judicial appointments;

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- Supreme Military Council decisions will be open to judicial review;
- The Supreme Military Administrative Court will be abolished;
- There will no longer be two military judges on the Constitutional Court;
- The universities will be autonomous and the YOK will be responsible for planning and coordination;
- Compulsory religion courses will become optional;
- The turban ban at universities will be lifted."

TV News:

NTV

Domestic News

- Fifteen suspects have been arrested in Sirnak for aiding the PKK. Five suspects have been arrested in Elazig for recruiting fighters for the PKK.
- A police officer, accused of killing a young driver who refused to pull over, has been released by the court.
- Turkey's Dogus Otomotiv said the Turkish automotive sector will grow 5 percent this year, shrugging off the impact of an economic slowdown in the US.

International News

- Iraq's Parliament has voted to allow members of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party to return to government jobs.
- President Bush traveled to Saudi Arabia for talks at the end of his eight-day Middle East trip.
- British Immigration Minister Liam Byrne said all visitors to Britain requiring visas will have to be fingerprinted starting Monday.

WILSON